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STATE FOR HAITI TASK FORCE

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SUBJECT: HAITI EARTHQUAKE: UNESCO MEETING ON SAVING HAITI'S  
HERITAGE

REF: UNESCO PARIS FR 000087

¶1. Summary. UNESCO, February 16, convened a meeting to bring together Haitian government officials, representatives of museums and cultural experts and representatives of other UNESCO member states to discuss the impact of the January 12 earthquake on Haiti's cultural heritage. The Haitian Minister of Culture described the devastation and efforts underway to deal with the situation. She made it clear that Haiti has the lead in preserving its art and culture but needs the help of the international community to build the capacity to do so. Experts discussed measures that must be taken in the near, medium and long term and underscored that priorities must be set when formulating a strategy for reconstruction. The U.S. and others reiterated the immediate need to secure sites and prevent pillaging and looting of Haitian artwork and other artifacts. UNESCO plans to set up an International Coordination Committee (ICC) to work with Haiti on establishing priorities and coordinating international assistance to Haiti in the culture sector. End Summary.

#### UNESCO Director General Opens the Meeting

¶2. UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova opened the meeting for Establishment of an International Coordination Committee (ICC) for Haitian Culture. She said that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to the Minister of Culture of Haiti in order to find out what is needed and how UNESCO and others can help. Having taken stock of the damage and needs, UNESCO, working with the Government of Haiti (GOH), would be able to devise an integrated strategy to meet those needs. UNESCO hopes to establish an International Coordination Committee (ICC) to help achieve this.

¶3. The Director General described the actions which UNESCO has taken to address the effect of the January 12 earthquake on Haiti's art and cultural heritage. She established a crisis unit and sent a mission to Haiti to assess the situation there (See para 8). She also sent a letter the UN SyG which contained a request that the UN operation in Haiti (MINUSTAH) protect cultural sites. UNESCO has suggested that the UN act to impose a ban on the sale of art and cultural artifacts from Haiti that lack identification. The aim would be to halt trafficking in stolen artwork but not interfere with the normal commerce of Haitian crafts which is an important source of income for its people.

#### Haiti Describes the Damage

¶4. The Minister of Culture of Haiti reported that the devastation had touched both tangible and intangible culture in Haiti. A hundred years of architecture had, in many cases, been reduced to rubble and the carnival, which showcases Haitian handicrafts (masks, etc.) and forms of cultural expression, would not take place this year. She described the losses as touching all forms of culture. The data base of Haitian literature was housed in a building which has collapsed and entire collections of media have been destroyed. The Haitian government will declare priority heritage locations and

must inventory cultural property. Their immediate goal will be to protect and preserve what they have. Experts and training programs will be needed to increase Haiti's capacity to deal with the destruction. In the long term, they must devise a strategy for such disasters.

15. Mr. Daniel Elie, Director of the Institute to Save the National Patrimony (ISPAN) reported that 230,000 people have been killed and 500,000 have left the earthquake area. There are a million people living in camps and as the rainy season begins, the need for 200,000 tents is acute. All the monuments in the historic center of Port au Prince have been destroyed. The Justice, Culture, Tax buildings, the National Palace and markets have all collapsed. Most of the churches were built from 1860-1912 and have also been destroyed. The situation is similar in Jacmel, where the Historic Center had been on the World Heritage tentative list. The city of Leogane has been almost entirely destroyed. Still standing are old wooden houses which survived the quake. He noted that following the earthquake of 1790, the French had a policy of constructing wooden buildings in the area but frequent fires led Haitians to build with bricks and cement. ISPAN is now being faced with a national disaster of major proportions and has a budget of \$375,000 per year. The organization has four architects, three engineers, two offices, two cars and six computers to deal with this situation.

#### Culture Institutions/Experts Assess the Damage

16. At least thirty museums and organizations working in the culture field were represented. The program provided an opportunity for them to share assessments of the impact of the quake on various aspects of Haiti's cultural heritage and to indicate what action they were prepared to take to ameliorate the situation. The representative of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) reported that they had participated in a reconnaissance mission in Haiti and are developing a data base of volunteers. They are ready to deploy international experts to help with shoring up buildings and reconstruction. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) representative noted that the Haitian Commission of ICOM has drawn up a list of what is currently needed to safeguard a dozen museums and thirty cultural institutions. The International Federation of Libraries and Archives (IFLA) representative said that they are currently working to identify buildings where books can be stored. Books are being sorted to determine what can be saved (placed in containers) and what cannot. The French National Library is working with libraries in Quebec and Providence to digitalize the written heritage of Haiti and "Libraries without Borders" has provided tarps to protect books from the rain and has completed a detailed thirty page report.

17. Dr. Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian addressed the subject of Haiti's intangible cultural heritage. He said that efforts are underway to determine how many of 500 Haitians who are on a list of those who exemplify Haiti's intangible heritage survived. He stressed the importance of providing materials so that Haitian artists can continue to create. They need money to ship their work abroad and need markets. The Smithsonian is looking for ways to help these artists market their crafts across the U.S. This will, he said, help to keep Haiti in the public eye and gain recognition and revenue for the artists. He said that the Smithsonian would work with other international organizations as partners in this effort but is looking for guidance from the Haitian government. What are Haiti's priorities? What does Haiti think about international aid to private collections? Kurin said that the Smithsonian stands ready to help and, in a subsequent intervention specified four ways it would be prepared to: (1) work with the GOH and the Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) on the preservation and restoration of movable cultural property and train Haitians in this work; (2) work with Laval University (Canada) and the State University of Haiti on a survey of Haitian Intangible Cultural Heritage especially aimed at determining needs for musicians, artisans and others so they can revive their work and take advantage of cultural economic opportunities for performances and commercial sales of art, crafts, and other products; (3) work, with the approval of the GOH, with UNESCO and others to establish an international base of operations for cultural recovery in Haiti; (This would require a large tent, storage facility, vehicles and

facilities for international teams.)

(4) serve on an International Cultural Committee for Haiti.

¶8. The representative of ICCROM noted that humanitarian considerations must be given the highest priority but after that its priorities are to gather consistent information, assess damage and create inventories, salvage and recover (while mitigating ongoing risks) and devise a preparedness plan for the future.

#### UNESCO Reports on its Mission

¶9. UNESCO officer Fernando Brugmann presented a slide show of pictures taken during his recent mission to Haiti which showed the destruction of cultural institutions and ongoing efforts by Haitians to retrieve those objects that can be saved. Noticeably missing from the photos was any evidence of a MINUSTAH or other UN presence at the sites. Noting that UNESCO had requested protection for the sites in early February, the U.S. inquired about the status of a protective guard. The Haitian delegation noted that they have hired a private security service that patrols the area every hour or two. A call line has been installed to report pillaging of sites. The Director of UNESCO's Culture Sector said that she had asked the Minister of Culture to contact MINUSTAH and had spoken with MINUSTAH and provided a list of sites. The UNESCO Mission reported that many private individuals have taken initiatives to secure the artwork. INTERPOL and Customs officials have also been contacted. The INTERPOL representative at the meeting said that its 188 members have been alerted about the imminent risk of illegal importation of stolen artwork from Haiti. He noted, however, that it was proving difficult to obtain the detailed documentation required to prevent transport of the goods. The UNESCO representative will contact MINUSTAH again to urge immediate action.

#### What is Needed? Now? Later?

¶10. The remainder of the session focused on the need to set priorities for necessary action. Some said that securing the most important buildings to make sure they are not pillaged should be a high priority. Others noted that when monuments and sites are rebuilt, they should be earthquake proof and one even asked whether Port au Prince should be rebuilt in the same place. The representative of Blue Shield International said that this "disaster can create an opportunity." Blue Shield has 500 volunteers ready to go to Haiti to help secure the area but they need infrastructure and logistical assistance. Art experts have started to inventory artwork but they need containers. The Haitian Culture Ministry representative said that the Haitian government is weak because of the earthquake but added that they were weak before the quake. They need external support to strengthen Haiti's capacity to do the job. The Google representative cited several ways in which the corporation could lend assistance, including: mapping to collect information; translating into Creole (recently added to its site); using "people finder" to help locate people and digitizing written cultural heritage; and using "my maps," which includes a street view feature.

¶11. Summing up the discussion, the Director of UNESCO's Culture Sector remarked that the strong attendance, particularly from the museums, institutions and other experts group showed a keen interest on the part of the international community in helping Haiti. The next step would be to set priorities. The Secretariat will prepare minutes of the meeting and provide them to Haitian officials who can begin the preparation of a "roadmap" and work with a International Co-ordination Committee to establish priorities for the near, medium and long term. If all agree, the ICC might meet in May or June of this year.

¶12. Comment: While we were pleased to see UNESCO trying to take the lead and galvanize an international effort to save Haiti's cultural heritage, we are not confident that adequate measures are being taken to secure Haitian cultural properties now. We defer to those on the ground, but periodic patrols by private security companies may not be enough to prevent theft. Despite repeated questions, UNESCO has never been able to assure us that MINUSTAH has deployed resources to protect Haitian cultural property. Instead, Secretariat staff and others familiar with the situation have repeatedly expressed concern to us that MINUSTAH's efforts to protect Haitian cultural property are inadequate.

13. MINIMIZE CONSIDERED  
KILLION